

New Britain ROOTS
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RE: HB 6842 – AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LOCAL FOOD FOR SCHOOLS INCENTIVE PROGRAM AND EXPANSION OF THE CT GROWN FOR CT KIDS GRANT PROGRAM

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, and members of the Education Committee,

This testimony is in support of HB 6842. My name is Joey Listro and I am the Executive Director for New Britain ROOTS, a nonprofit organization with a mission to increase community food security through local agriculture. We do our work by breaking down barriers to food access and offering meaningful experiences to children and youth through farm-to-school experiences.

This legislation addresses a number of barriers school districts face in accessing locally grown food. School nutrition programs struggle with the cost of local food, the logistics to source from local producers, and the ability to process that food once it arrives from the farm. Food Service Directors agree, if they have access to an incentive program to offset the cost of local produce, they will purchase more CT Grown food as a way to improve the meals they serve children.

We know from other states that simply offering local food purchasing incentives yields only limited results. That is why this legislation builds the capacity for CSDE to provide districts with the technical assistance needed to be successful. Grants will be available to support local food implementation, providing direct technical assistance to educators, administrators, and nutrition professionals.

In New Britain, the CT Grown for CT Kids Grants have helped establish a new garden at Smith Elementary School, supporting the learning of at least 100 students in STEAM classes and the afterschool program. Grant funds are also being implemented to install an observation honeybee hive at Smalley Elementary, a new greenhouse at Lincoln Elementary school, produce washing stations for Slade and Roosevelt schools, and professional development in garden-based education for district teachers. This grant program, although new, quickly became one of the Department of Agriculture's most popular and successful grant programs. I hope you consider funding it fully.

Growing and purchasing locally grown food helps increase students' access to and knowledge of fresh fruits and vegetables, increase student participation in school meal programs and boost the local economy. We can feed children well while supporting local farmers and the economy. It's a win-win.

Sincerely,

Joey Listro
Executive Director, New Britain ROOTS